

The Resurgent India

A Monthly National Review

May 2021



“Let us all work for the Greatness of India.”
– The Mother

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Successful Future

(Full of Promise and Joyful Surprises)

Botanical name: Gaillardia Pulchella

Common name: Indian blanket, Blanket flower, Fire-wheels

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A DECLARATION

We do not fight against any creed, any religion.

We do not fight against any form of government.

We do not fight against any social class.

We do not fight against any nation or civilisation.

We are fighting division, unconsciousness, ignorance, inertia and falsehood.

We are endeavouring to establish upon earth union, knowledge, consciousness, Truth, and we fight whatever opposes the advent of this new creation of Light, Peace, Truth and Love.

— The Mother

(Collected works of the Mother, Vol. 13, pp. 124-25)

THE ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS RESULTS: CHARTING A PATH RIDDLED WITH FRICTION

The results of the recently concluded assembly elections – in West Bengal, Assam, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Puducherry – have been mixed with both surprises as well as predictability. Indicative of the changing nature of the polity, the results show new patterns of political mobilization as well as the challenges ahead for the larger vision of national consolidation in India. Despite gaining a greater number of total seats across the five states in these elections, India's ruling party, the BJP, has suffered a serious psychological setback due to the results in Bengal. The hard challenge posed by regional formations also appears to be sturdy for now.

WEST BENGAL – AN UNPREDICTABLE VERDICT AND A SETBACK

Bengal's election was the most critical amongst all the elections. This election was not only about the state of Bengal – the birthplace of modern Indian nationalism and the cultural laboratory of India during the colonial times – but also about consolidating the sweep of nationalism across the country. If Bengal had defeated the politics of regionalism and separatist secularism, India's East would have become a stronger bulwark against the divisive forces. The setback suffered by the ruling party in this election portends that the challenge is difficult and the road is riddled with friction.

In Bengal, while many of the exit polls had predicted a win for Trinamool Congress (TMC), they had anticipated a close contest. Many of Bengali exit polls had even predicted

a BJP victory. The results betrayed all these assumptions. Not only did the TMC win, but it won by a massive margin of votes. The BJP came down from the vote-share that it had gained in 2019 Lok Sabha polls.

BJP’s vote-share was lower than that of TMC across all phases, indicating that the BJP’s internal analysis had failed to predict the trends on the ground.

	Vote Share (%)		
	TMC	BJP	Left-Congress
Phase 1	45.7	42.8	7.4
Phase 2	46.9	44.3	6.3
Phase 3	50.2	36.4	10.3
Phase 4	47.7	38	11.2
Phase 5	43.3	39.9	10.5
Phase 6	47.8	38.4	9.8
Phase 7	52	32.8	11.2
Phase 8	52.2	32.2	12.3

Source: Lokniti-CSDS

The Congress-Left combine suffered a defeat as well, with both parties getting zero seats. Their alliance partner Rashtriya Secular Majlis Party led by Muslim leaders won 1 seat.

Party	Vote share (%)			Seat share		
	2021	2019	2016	2021	2019	2016
TMC	48%	44%	45%	213	22	211
BJP	38%	41%	10%	77	18	3
Congress	3%	6%	12%	0	2	44
Left Front	6%	7%	20%	0	0	26

Others	5%	2%	7%	2	0	10
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Source: Lokniti-CSDS

Strike Rate or Contested Vote-share (%):

Party	2021	2019	2016
TMC	48.5	43.3	45.18
BJP	38.2	40.2	10.28
Congress-Left	9.8	9.8	39.1

Source: Lokniti-CSDS

THE FAILURE OF HINDU MOBILIZATION:

The BJP’s main plank in this election was Hindutva and nationalism. The party has worked hard, over many years, to consolidate the Hindu population of Bengal. Demography is a critical factor, and the roots of secularism and legacy of Leftism runs deep in the state. The state has 30% Muslim population. In this election, BJP was only partially successful in consolidating the Hindus – and that is the main reason behind BJP’s loss, with all other details being minor. While the party managed to get 50% of the Hindu votes this time, yet in 2019’s general election, the party had managed to get 57% of the Hindu votes consolidated behind it – this election portended a clear loss. The TMC, on the other hand, not only had the entire Muslim vote-share rallying solidly behind it – with no division of Muslim votes – but also increased its Hindu vote-share from 32% in 2019 to 39% in 2021. The results show that Hindus completely failed to consolidate. Even those Hindus that believed that the TMC government had unduly favoured the Muslims, continued to vote for the TMC (Basu, et al, 2021).

	Voted for TMC (%)			Voted for BJP (%)		
	2016	2019	2021	2016	2019	2021
Hindu	43	32	39	12	57	50
Muslim	51	70	75	6	4	7

Source: Lokniti-CSDS

Hindus managed to consolidate only in those seats where the Muslim population was dominant. Post-poll surveys during 2019 and 2021 elections indicate that, as compared to the rest of the country, Bengali Hindus (especially the Bhadraklok – upper caste, upper class traditional Left voter) remain steeped in liberalism and secularism. Therefore, even as BJP’s Hindutva advocacy heightened in this election campaign, the Left-Congress Traditional Hindu base got divided among TMC and BJP, instead of going heavily towards BJP as had happened in 2019.

GENDER DISADVANTAGE TO BJP:

Besides the lack of Hindu polarization, one of the other major reasons for BJP’s poor performance was the relative lack of support of women voters compared to the TMC.

	Voted for TMC (%)			Voted for BJP (%)		
	2016	2019	2021	2016	2019	2021
Men	42	41	46	10	42	40
Women	48	47	50	10	38	37

Source: Lokniti-CSDS

It is evident from the voting patterns that TMC’s women vote share has been consistently higher than the BJP by significant margins. Here also, the patterns differ according to caste dynamic.

	Voted for TMC (%)	Voted for BJP (%)
Upper caste men	38	49
Upper caste women	45	43
OBC men	36	45
OBC women	36	54
Dalit men	33	57
Dalit women	38	53
Adivasi men	36	54
Adivasi women	49	38
Muslim men	75	8
Muslim women	75	7

Source: Lokniti-CSDS

Muslim, Adivasi and upper caste women showed a greater preference for the TMC. Mamata Banerjee’s well-known women-specific schemes and promises seem to have played a greater role in enhancing her appeal to women. Moreover, personal attacks on Mamata by the BJP were not taken kindly by the people.

THE FACTOR OF CASTE-WISE MOBILIZATION:

BJP’s traditional modus operandi, across states, has been to build a coalition of non-dominant Hindu castes, in order to unify the Hindu community. Due to the lack of Hindu mobilization, this does not seem to have worked well in Bengal.

	Voted for TMC (%)			Voted for BJP (%)		
	2016	2019	2021	2016	2019	2021
Upper castes	43	38	42	14	50	46
OBCs	44	27	36	11	68	49

Rajbanshis	43	8	38	9	75	59
Namasudras	43	38	31	10	54	58
Other Dalits	40	36	37	11	54	52
Adivasi	52	24	42	9	62	46
Muslims	51	70	75	6	4	7
Others	30	NA	19	10	NA	53

Source: Lokniti-CSDS

It is evident that the BJP has suffered massive losses among certain sections of non-dominant Hindu castes that it had managed to mobilize in 2019. BJP has lost vote-share among OBCs, Rajbanshis and Adivasis and marginally among other Dalits. TMC increased its vote-share among upper castes, OBCs, Rajbanshis and Adivasis. The additional Muslim consolidation behind TMC further cemented its victory.

Despite the loss in support from Rajbanshis, BJP managed to perform well in North Bengal due to support from other communities.

REGION-WISE VOTE-SHARE:

In terms of regional performance, TMC has done well in Greater Kolkata region and in urban areas, where its vote share has been more than 50%, while the BJP has won most of its seats from areas reserved for STs and in areas with farming communities.

	Voted for TMC (%)	Voted for BJP (%)
Greater Kolkata	52.6	32.1
North Bengal	44.6	42.1
South East Bengal	49.5	33.2

South West Bengal	47.1	41.6
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Source: Lokniti-CSDS

However, across all regions, TMC’s vote-share has been higher than that of the BJP.

	Voted for TMC (%)	Voted for BJP (%)
Rural	47.9	39.5
Semi-rural	44.2	39.9
Semi-urban	45.6	40
Urban	50.9	33.7

Source: Lokniti-CSDS

TMC’s best performance and BJP’s worst performance has been in urban areas. BJP has performed well in semi-urban areas, but has lagged behind TMC across all areas.

OTHER FACTORS:

One of the other major factors behind BJP’s drubbing has been the disenchantment of party workers with ticket distribution. After the candidate selection, BJP units had seen several protests, which were dismissed by the party. A majority of BJP’s 46 candidates who joined from other parties, including 36 from TMC, lost.

ASSAM – A BJP CONSOLIDATION

Contrary to its performance in Bengal, BJP was easily able to retain Assam, due to Hindu consolidation and a thorough strategy to beat the anti-CAA lobby. This victory has strengthened BJP’s eastern footprint, making it the only non-Congress party to win Assam for the second time. Interestingly, Assam election is the opposite of Bengal verdict – in the sense that strong Hindu consolidation happened in

Assam, propelling the BJP to victory.

Congress contested with Badruddin Ajmal's All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF) and Bodoland People's Front (BOPF). BJP's alliance partners were Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) and United People's Party Liberal (UPPL). A third front was formed by Assam Jatiya Parishad (AJP) and Raijor Dal (RD) – ostensibly to campaign against the CAA. However, this third front ended up performing badly and harming the Congress-led alliance in various seats more than the BJP-led alliance. Its seats were more than the winning margins of BJP in 11 seats in Upper Assam and it played a big spoiler for the Congress by dividing the anti-CAA votes.

	Seat share		Vote share (%)		Contested vote share 2021 (%)
	2021	2016	2021	2016	
Congress	30	26	28.6	30.9	40.1
AIUDF	14	13	9.8	13.1	54.7
BJP	56	60	31.4	29.6	44.1
AGP	11	14	8.3	8.2	34.6
BOPF	2	12	4.2	3.9	35.7

Source: Lokniti-CSDS

BJP's seat share reduced by 4 seats compared to 2016 elections, while its vote-share increased slightly by 1.8 percent. Congress's seat-share increased by 4 seats while its vote-share went down slightly by 2.3 percent.

BJP's victory lay in its superior performance in the Upper Assam region, among the SC-ST reserved seats (especially SC seats) and in semi-rural areas which form the bulk of seats in Assam, while it did not perform very well in the Lower Assam and Barak Valley regions.

Region	Congress-led Grand Alliance (vote share %)	BJP-led NDA (vote share %)
Barak Valley	45.2	43.5
Lower Assam	51.2	39.8
Upper Assam	35.7	48.9

Source: Lokniti-CSDS

Seats	Congress-led Grand Alliance (vote share %)	BJP-led NDA (vote share %)
General	51.3	43.5
Scheduled Caste (SC)	32.5	52.9
Scheduled Tribe (ST)	43.7	44.2

Source: Lokniti-CSDS

The Lower Assam region is Muslim-dominated, and Congress's controversial first-time alliance with AIUDF brought them Bengali origin Miya-Muslim votes, while the polarization ensured that Hindus consolidated behind the BJP.

Congress also failed to succeed in targeting the BJP through the anti-CAA sentiment in Assam. In 2019, Assam had seen some of the biggest protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) due to the fearful propaganda that it would lead to illegal Hindu Bangladeshi migration into Assam. However, BJP's deft dealing with the protests at the time and subsequently prevented it from becoming an issue this election.

HINDU CONSOLIDATION:

In Assam, Hindus constitute 62% of the population. A strong Hindu consolidation behind the BJP is one of the most important factors behind BJP's victory in Assam. Two-thirds of Hindus (around 67%) voted for BJP this time, compared to 57% in 2016 elections. The Congress managed to secure only 19% Hindu votes. Its alliance with AIUDF alienated even traditional Hindu supporters of Congress.

Within the Hindu community, 67% Assamese Hindus and 74% Bengali Hindus voted for BJP, compared to 64% and 63% respectively in 2016, showing that Hindu consolidation cut across ethnic lines. Muslims, on the other hand, rallied behind the Grand Alliance, with 81% Muslims voting for it. However, here also, Bengali Muslims voted more for the Grand Alliance, compared to Assamese Muslims. Around a quarter of Assamese Muslims (around 24%) voted for the NDA.

	Voted for Grand Alliance (%)	Voted for NDA (%)	Voted for AJP-RD alliance (%)	Voted for others (%)
Hindus	19 (32)	67 (57)	7	7 (11)
Muslims	81 (77)	11 (6)	2	6 (17)
Others	36 (48)	48 (39)	9	7 (13)
Assamese Hindus	17 (24)	67 (64)	12	4 (12)
Assamese Muslims	65 (78)	24 (7)	7	4 (15)

Bengali Hindus	23 (31)	74 (63)	1	2 (6)
Bengali Muslims	89 (76)	8 (6)	1	2 (18)
Others	34 (53)	49 (33)	4	13 (14)

(Figures in brackets are vote-share percentages for the year 2016)

Source: Lokniti-CSDS

The table above clearly shows that religious polarization was a major factor in this election. Interestingly, BJP's Assamese Muslim support has gone up from 7% in 2016 to 24% in 2021, thereby confirming the widening divide between Assamese Muslims and Bengali Muslims. BJP has increased its vote-share among all communities, including Bengali and Assamese Muslims.

CASTE AND COMMUNITY CONSOLIDATION:

The Hindu consolidation in this election cut across not only ethnicity but also the caste and community factors. BJP performed very well among tribal communities and lower castes. Even though Congress alliance included the Bodoland People's Front, yet this time even the Bodo community was polarized along religious lines.

	Voted for Grand Alliance (%)	Voted for NDA (%)	Voted for AJP-RD (%)	Voted for Others (%)
Upper caste	21	68	8	3
OBCs	20	64	9	7
Dalits	15	73	4	8

Other STs (Tiwa, Karbi, Mising, Rabha, Mech, Hajong etc.)	15	74	3	8
Others	35	49	9	7
Communities in Bodo areas				
Bodos in Bodo areas	18	42	4	36
Muslims in Bodo areas	76	11	2	11
Others in Bodo areas	19	70	1	10

Source: Lokniti-CSDS

BJP has performed the best among Dalits and non-Bodo STs. It has also performed vastly better than the Congress alliance among the Bodo community members and among others in Bodo areas. Among upper castes too, BJP is vastly ahead of Congress. BJP's ally UPPL is a young Bodo party – playing a role in signing the recent Bodo Accord. The fact that Bodoland People's Front suffered a great blow in Bodo areas shows that its more than a decade-old dominance in the region is over.

Thus, patterns of caste and community voting clearly indicate religious consolidation among, both, Hindus and Muslims.

The massive defeats suffered by Grand Alliance as well as the AJP-RD alliance show that Assamese sub-

regional nationalism is being subsumed by BJP’s pan-Indian nationalist politics. AJP-RD’s main plank of campaign was the threat to Assamese nationalism by ‘outsiders’ due to legislations like CAA. While Assamese nationalism is a concrete historical movement and has been the main basis of Assamese politics, it seems to have suffered a blow in this election. This is a significant step forward in national consolidation in eastern India.

TAMIL NADU – A DECISIVE WIN FOR DMK

Tamil Nadu elections went along the predicted lines, with the DMK winning decisively. The politics of the state continues to be as opaque and impenetrable as ever. Unlike Assam, where years of hard work is now ensuring the accommodation of Assamese nationalism under the unifying force of Indian nationalism, in Tamil Nadu, the traditional strains of regional divide continue to be as strong as ever.

		Seat share		Vote share		Contested vote-share (%)	
		2021	2016	2021	2016	2021	2016
DMK and major allies	DMK	133	89	37.5	31.6	46.3	41.1
	Congress	16	8	4	6.4	41.3	36.5
	Left	4	0	2.1	1.5	39.3	7
	VCK	4	0	1.1	0.8	42	6.9
	IUML	-	-	0.5	0.7	38.9	33.1
AIADMK and major allies	AIADMK	69	134	33.3	40.7	40.8	40.7
	BJP	4	0	2.7	2.9	34.1	3.5
	PMK	4	0	4	5.4	37.8	5.4
	MNM+	-	-	2.4	0	3.3	0
	NTK+	-	-	6.6	1	6.6	1

Source: Lokniti-CSDS

AIADMK has reduced its seat share from 134 to 69 and vote share from 40.7% to 33.3%, relative to 2016 election, while DMK has increased its seat-share and vote-share both. Interestingly, Sasikala’s nephew – TTV Dhinakaran – could not make a mark in these elections, winning zero seats.

BJP’s performance has been little better compared to 2016. It’s contested vote-share has also increased considerably compared to 2016.

THE CASTE EQUATIONS:

Caste equations play an important role in Tamil Nadu elections. DMK won mainly with the support of upper castes, Dalits and minorities. AIADMK drew its support from dominant backward castes, such as its traditional Thevar vote-base.

	Voted for DMK+ (%)	Voted for AIADMK+ (%)	Voted for Others (%)
Upper caste	47 (35)	30 (47)	23 (18)
Thevar	19 (40)	55 (48)	26 (12)
Udayar	38 (40)	32 (38)	30 (22)
Mudaliars	43 (40)	52 (46)	5 (14)
Vanniyars	39 (35)	54 (35)	7 (30)
Mutharayar	26 (32)	45 (47)	29 (21)
Gounder	35 (51)	59 (43)	6 (6)
Nadar	50 (44)	36 (42)	14 (14)
Viswakarma	41 (42)	57 (43)	2 (15)
Other OBCs	38 (42)	36 (42)	26 (16)
Arunthathiyar	68 (47)	25 (40)	7 (13)
Other Dalits	65 (40)	30 (31)	5 (29)

STs	50 (37)	40 (63)	10 (0)
Muslim	69 (49)	24 (42)	7 (9)
Christian	56 (50)	38 (35)	6 (15)
Others	52 (37)	32 (30)	16 (33)

(Figures in brackets are vote share percentages for 2016)

Source: Lokniti-CSDS

It is evident that DMK has lost among the Thevars mainly. It has also made hefty gains among Dalits, STs and Muslims. AIADMK has strengthened its position among its traditional dominant Thevar community and Vanniyars, and Gounders. These are all dominant OBC communities. It has lost among Arunthathiyar Dalits, STs and Muslims. The OBC quota for the Vanniyar community has helped AIADMK perform well in northern and western Tamil Nadu.

Besides, a strong two-term anti-incumbency, lack of a personality to challenge DMK's MK Stalin and BJP's role have resulted in inevitable losses for the AIADMK-led alliance. Except in the western parts, anti-BJP sentiment is dominant across Tamil Nadu. BJP acted as a liability for the AIADMK-led alliance, pulling down its support even among AIADMK supporters, who saw BJP as a threat to the state's social fabric. The alliance performed worst in BJP-contested seats.

Tamil Nadu politics has come far from the days of Dravidian cultural assertion. It is now based on an intricate mix of money power and caste equations. However, an ideological strain of Dravidianism continues to be visible in the dominant public commitment to a secular social fabric and politics of social justice that was once the hallmark of the Dravidian movement. So strong is the strain that it

accommodates all castes and communities and all major political parties.

PUDUCHERRY – AN NDA VICTORY

The Puducherry election saw a victory of the NDA and a defeat of the DMK-Congress alliance. The NDA was constituted by All India NR Congress (AINRC), BJP and AIADMK.

		Seat share		Vote share (%)		Contested vote share (%)	
		2021	2016	2021	2016	2021	2016
UPA	Congress	2	15	15.71	30.6	33	43
	DMK	6	2	18.5	8.9	43	31
NDA	AINRC	10	8	25.85	28.1	48	29
	BJP	6	0	13.86	2.4	44	3
	AIADMK	0	4	4.4	16.8	26	29
Independent		6	1	12.68	-	-	-

Source: Election Commission of India Website

BJP saw a significant improvement in its performance in Puducherry, while Congress saw a massive decline compared to 2016.

KERALA – A LEFT SWEEP

Kerala elections, along expected lines, saw a decisive sweep by the Left alliance. Trumping historical trend of Congress and Left alternating in power after every state election, the Left alliance trumped anti-incumbency to come back to power.

The Left alliance – Left Democratic Front (LDF) –

consisted of CPI(M), CPI, KEC(M) and JD(S). The Congress-led alliance – United Democratic Front (UDF) – consisted of Congress, Indian Union Muslim League (IUML), RSP and Kerala Congress. The NDA consisted of BJP, BDJS and AIADMK, and it faced a complete rout.

		Seat share		Vote share (%)		Contested vote share (%)	
		2021	2016	2021	2016	2021	2016
LDF	CPI(M)	62	58	25.4	26.8	47	44.3
	CPI	17	19	7.6	8.3	45.5	44.8
	KEC(M)	5	6	3.3	4.1	41.1	38.8
	JD(S)	2	3	1.3	1.2	45.1	41.8
UDF	Congress	21	22	25.1	23.4	37.9	37.9
	IUML	15	18	8.3	7.6	45.2	45.5
	Kerala Congress	2	0	2.7	0.2	40.5	9.1
	RSP	0	0	1.2	1.1	33.3	31
NDA	BJP	0	1	11.3	10.2	13.6	14.9
	BDJS	0	0	1.1	3.9	7.6	15
	AIADMK	0	1	0	0.1	6.8	3.4

Source: Lokniti-CSDS

It is evident that in terms of overall vote-share, BJP has the third highest vote-share. It has also increased its vote-share from 2016. However, its contested vote-share has gone down slightly.

	Voted UDF		Voted LDF		Voted NDA		Voted Others	
	2016	2021	2016	2021	2016	2021	2016	2021
Hindu	26	25	48	50	22	21	4	4

Nairs	20	38	45	32	33	27	2	3
Other Upper castes	53	35	36	27	11	32	2	6
Ezhavas	28	21	49	53	18	23	5	3
Other OBCs	27	17	49	61	19	18	5	4
SCs	22	21	51	69	23	7	4	4
Muslims	58	58	35	39	3	1	4	2
Christians	51	57	35	39	10	2	4	1
Others (including STs)	27	28	53	42	14	22	6	8

Source: Lokniti-CSDS

In Kerala Muslims and Christians constitute 27% and 18% of the population respectively. They are the traditional vote base of the UDF. This time they shifted slightly towards the LDF, especially from lower class or poor Muslim and Christian sections of the groups. BJP suffered a big blow in its Christian vote base. BJP also saw a significant decline in its Dalit vote base, and the LDF saw a significant uptick in the same. Within Hindus, non-Ezhava OBCs also voted for LDF. Upper castes and Nairs moved away from LDF towards UDF.

Issues like love jihad, Sabrimala agitation and others worked to the advantage of either UDF or LDF, but not BJP. BJP's interventions with church leaders of various sects and attempts to make inroads among Christians also failed spectacularly. The party had no particular strategy to consolidate Hindu vote base across constituencies, and

was limited to raising issues. However, BJP did play trouble-maker in various constituencies and made it a triangular fight.

CONCLUSION

The recent state assembly elections have bolstered the strength of regional parties and spelt further impending failure for the Congress. BJP has, in the longer run, expanded its overall footprint across all states and has retained power in Assam and gained it in Puducherry. However, this expansion has been marred by the performance in Bengal elections. BJP's aggressive campaign in Bengal may have propelled it from 3 seats to 77 seats in assembly, but the decline from Lok Sabha elections of 2019 is noticeable. The reason lies squarely in the lack of Hindu unification.

In every state except Assam, the failure of Hindu consolidation is a visible trend. In southern states like Tamil Nadu and Kerala, politics of narrow regionalism and secularism combined with welfarism has trumped the nationalistic outreach. In Bengal, Hindu consolidation has occurred to an extent, but remains incomplete. However, the victory in Assam – the very epicenter of sub-regional nationalism and narrow regionalism – shows that regional formations have their limits. This has come after hard demographic lessons, with Assam following Kashmir in housing India's second-largest Muslim population and having suffered from consequences of illegal immigration.

The elections also reveal the limitations of the calculative and manipulative ways carried to the excess by the BJP. While the party's Hindu outreach, nationalist consolidation and hard work is commendable, much of it occurs on the

basis of the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh's (RSS) work. By itself, the tendency of the party to fossilize and use its ideology mechanically with calculation and without any real spirit will always backfire. The lack of a deeper perception within India's ruling class, and the political tendency to manipulate nationalism to suit its own ends, is preventing it from consolidating a progressive political culture for the nation. As a result, future trajectories are hampered by much friction and setbacks, through which lessons are learnt.

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COVID-19: DID THE MODI GOVERNMENT REALLY MISHANDLE THE SECOND WAVE?

Even though the 'second wave' in India has already peaked and the active cases are declining rapidly, the efforts to build the narratives to show the Modi Government in the negative – that the government handled the pandemic very badly – are still on the rise. The international media is buzzing with haunted stories about India's covid scenario. The sad videos, hopeless sounding articles, pictures of mass funerals and then the pre-planned social media campaigns – exactly on lines of the leaked congress toolkit – to show India in a mess and, particularly, to discredit Modi.

But, data has another story to tell. Let's see!

THE OVERALL PICTURE IN NUMBERS

Reporting the data in proportion to the population and in absolute numbers, both present the contrasting picture. For example, while comparing India's story with other countries, if covid related cumulative deaths or the cumulative confirmed cases are reported in absolute numbers but the vaccination magnitude in the percentage of population – a grossly misleading and inappropriate procedure, it would certainly give a gloomy picture of India. But if we reverse this, i.e., if deaths and confirmed cases are reported in percentage or per million and vaccinations in absolute numbers, the scene is just the opposite.

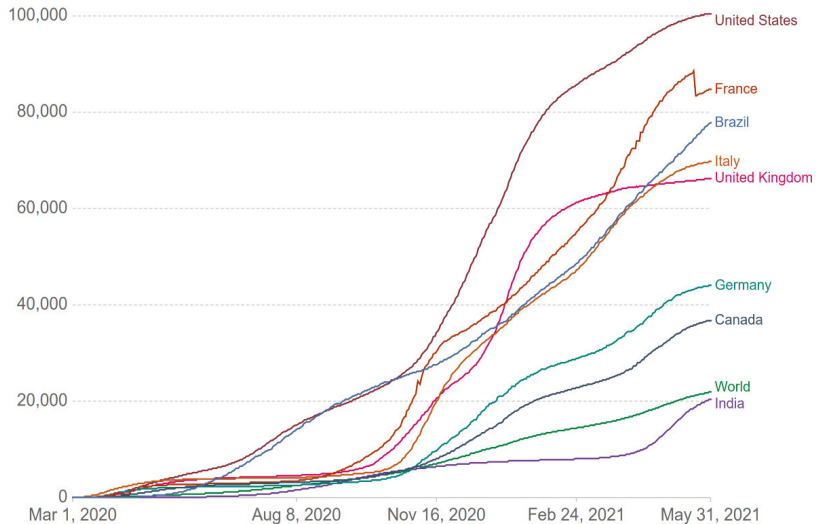
The table and few charts below elaborate the overall picture in detail.

As on May 31, 2021	Cumulative Confirmed Cases		Cumulative Deaths		Vaccinations (at least one dose)	
	Absolute No.	Per Million	Absolute No.	Per Million	Absolute No.	Percent of Population
USA	33.26m	100487	594443	1795.89	167.73m	50.15
India	28.05m	20324	329100	238.48	165.60m	12.12
Germany	3.69m	44014	88431	1055.46	36.25m	43.26
Italy	4.22m	69730	126046	2084.72	23.21m	38.38
France	5.73m	88784	109562	1621.60	25.47m	37.69
UK	4.50m	66286	128043	1886.15	39.38m	58.01
Canada	1.39m	36732	25473	674.92	21.46m	56.86
Brazil	16.52m	77696	461931	2173.18	45.08m	21.21
World	170.35m	21854	3.54m	454.32	836.04m	10.73

(data sourced from <https://ourworldindata.org/covid-cases>)

Cumulative confirmed COVID-19 cases per million people

The number of confirmed cases is lower than the number of actual cases; the main reason for that is limited testing.



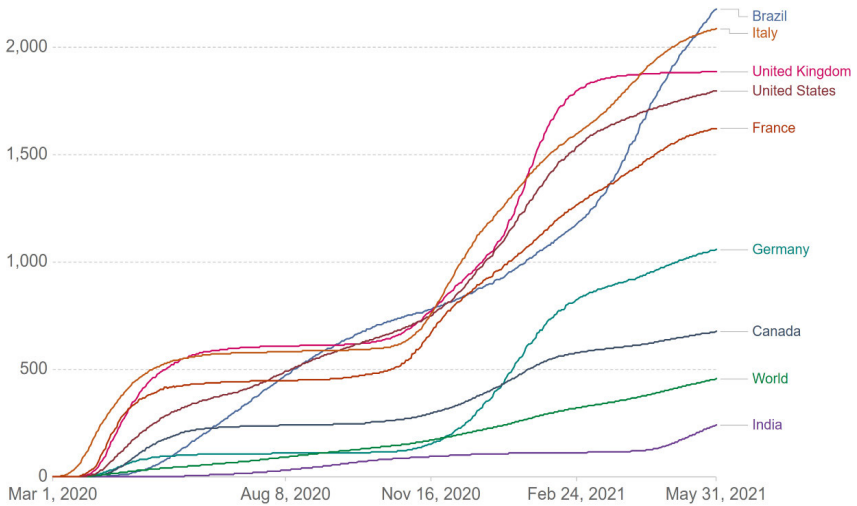
Source: Johns Hopkins University CSSE COVID-19 Data

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Cumulative confirmed COVID-19 deaths per million people



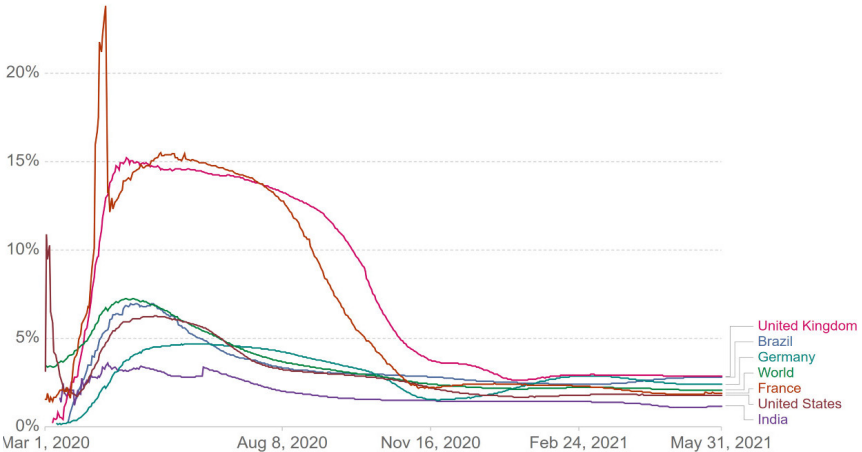
Limited testing and challenges in the attribution of the cause of death means that the number of confirmed deaths may not be an accurate count of the true number of deaths from COVID-19.



Case fatality rate of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic



The Case Fatality Rate (CFR) is the ratio between confirmed deaths and confirmed cases. During an outbreak of a pandemic the CFR is a poor measure of the mortality risk of the disease. We explain this in detail at OurWorldInData.org/Coronavirus



Source: Johns Hopkins University CSSE COVID-19 Data

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After studying the charts above, it becomes evident that the story of India is opposite of what most of the international media like the BBC, Washington Post or the Guardian, and their minions in India (the Wire, the Print, Mojo, Lallantop, NDTV etc.) including the stooges of Congress and AAP, want us to believe. Beside other numbers, even the case fatality ratio of India (1.12%) is much lower than the world average (2.08%), the UK (2.84%) or the US (1.79%).

UNDER-REPORTING OF THE DEATH COUNT IN INDIA?

Once it became clear that the available data doesn't paint India at all badly, they started peddling the stories that the fatalities are being massively under-reported by India. The stories of dead bodies flowing in the Ganga, overburdened crematoriums and pictures of mass funerals were peddled across national and international media.

Of course, all covid waves, across all countries, suffer from somewhat inaccurate counting/attribution of deaths. In theory, there's both under and over counting (since any death with covid positive report is counted as covid death though true cause may be some other ailment). Though, in practice, it is under-counting in aggregate. Even developed countries with better tracking/systems may have 1.5x or more deaths than their reported data. This 'innate' error may apply to India as well. It may be a little higher in India since the death registration process may be a little less efficient. If it is 1.5x for the West, for India it cannot be too much more than this. This certainly cannot automatically mean 5x or 10x of the official numbers. The extraordinary claims of 5x or 10x need extraordinary proof, not just shoddy anecdotal analysis as these peddlers are doing.

So far, such proof is absent. Robust systematic, pan India evidence like Oxygen consumption proves the opposite. As per the table below, India’s medical oxygen demand trend offers strong evidence that our measured severity of wave-2 based on cases, hospitalizations and deaths is roughly correct. It suggests no dramatic all-India under-counting and proves all those 5x, 10x peddlers plainly wrong and motivated.

Comparison of peaks between wave 1 and wave 2

	Wave 1	Wave 2	Multiplier
New Cases	97894 (Sept 16, 2020)	414188 (May 6, 2021)	~ 4 x
Active Cases	120929 (Oct. 10, 2020)	3741302 (May 9, 2021)	~ 3 x
Deaths	1281 (Sept 15, 2021)	4529 (May 18, 2021)	~ 4 x
Oxygen Demand	3000MT	9000 MT	~ 3 x

Source of medical oxygen demand: Indian Express (23.05.2021)

Early data on “all cause” mortality in wave 1 actually shows no big jump. In fact, Kerala, Gujarat recorded fewer deaths in 2020 than in 2019. If covid was massively larger, overall mortality would have been impacted (as Europe and the USA saw in 2020). So, our wave 1 data is ok. Wave 2 to wave 1 ratio also checks out across metrics.

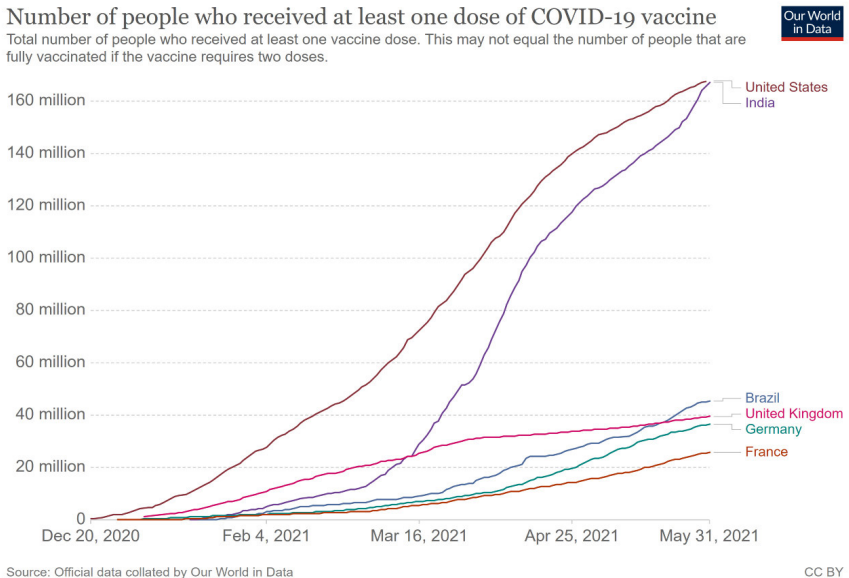
Now it is evident that India’s per capita covid severity was way lower than the West even if our weaker systems undercounted somewhat more than West. However this conclusion is unpalatable to ‘some’ who are so keen to

persist with 5-10x claims without systematic evidence.

THE VACCINATION STORY

Amid the hue and cry about the shortage of oxygen, medicines, etc., at a time when the wave was at its peak, there was also created an impression that Modi failed to vaccinate its population in time, as if the vaccine was a panacea and every other country had already vaccinated its people. As if the vaccines (with quality assured) are in abundance in the international market and it was only Modi who did not try to procure in time. But we know that that is not the case. Availability of the vaccines are scarce and it takes time to produce or procure and then administer them. It is callous to demand to do it in a day.

The chart below gives a perspective of India's vaccination drive, one of the largest in the world, in comparison to other developed countries. Considering India's population



being more than the entire Europe and the USA combined, here it is only logical to use absolute numbers instead of percentage of population as manufacturing/procuring the vaccine and its administration is not directly related to the size of population, rather the bigger the population the harder it is to vaccinate it.

As of May 31, India has already vaccinated (at least one jab) its 167.19 million people in just 136 days while USA took almost 160 days to vaccinate the same numbers and that too India did at an approximately 1/10th of the cost that of the US. This shows the commitment and effectiveness of the efforts of GOI, as opposed to what these agenda peddlers want us to believe. Further, the GOI has shown its intent to vaccinate fully (2 doses) its whole population latest by the end of December 2021.

THE CASE OF VACCINE EXPORT

A total of 6.63 Cr vaccines are exported from India under three categories,

1. Grant: Under this humanitarian approach by the government of India, 1.07Cr vaccines were donated to 47 countries, mostly to our neighbors as it is important to stop Covid in neighboring countries to keep India itself safe from the spread.

2. Commercial Export: Under the commercial obligations, 3.58 Cr Vaccines are exported. The manufacturer either received money or Raw Material at the early stage which is used for the production of Vaccines. As per agreements made, the exports are made by the manufacturer. The government has no direct control over this.

3. COVAX program: Covax is a World Health Organization Initiative under which resources are shared to develop the vaccine faster. It also brings vaccines to poor countries who cannot afford advance payments individually. As India is part of the Covax program, 1.986Cr vaccines were exported under this initiative.

While the GOI could not have stopped the exports under commercial obligation or covax initiative, as that would have brought heavy legal damages to the manufacturers, it could have certainly stopped the grants. But then, at that time it was believed to have enough in store to meet its demand in January or even February.

CONCLUSION

This cannot be denied that there has been too much pressure on our health infrastructure to cope with. The steepness of the second wave only made it worse. But it is also true that no government, with however advanced or developed health infra, could have coped with such pressure. We have seen the crumbling infra of Europe and the USA when the first wave was at its peak there.

Here we have shown that the GOI has phenomenally handled the pandemic as compared to other developed countries on almost all metrics, be it cumulative death numbers or case fatality ratio or even vaccination of its people. To say that the Indian government has failed in handling the pandemic and put the country in a state of mess is simply callous and only shows their pathetic hate towards it.

HIGHLIGHTS

POST-POLL VIOLENCE IN BENGAL

The aftermath of the assembly election results has seen the unprecedented advent of violence against BJP workers by TMC cadre. The violence commenced immediately after the announcement of the results, with the burning down of several regional BJP offices across West Bengal. This was followed by horrors of lynching, beatings, torture and murder of political opponents by the ruling TMC cadre. The victims belonged to BJP, Left and Congress, but the BJP was targeted the most. In constituencies where the TMC lost, the violence was the worst (Bhattacharya, 2021).

In many cases, a communal angle was attributed to the violence in some areas such as Birbhum. While violence occurred mainly in rural and semi-urban areas, the areas near Kolkata were also reported to have witnessed such incidents. In many tribal areas, tribal people successfully fought back the TMC goons. Besides the violence, there has been heavy migration of Hindus from Bengal to Assam, and lot of temporary internal displacement within Bengal, as people had to flee their homes in some areas. As per Assam BJP unit's claims, around 80,000 Hindus migrated to Assam and were living in temporary relief camps.

In response to the violence, while the TMC could not deny the reports, it dismissed it as the usual post-poll violence that has normally been a part of Bengal's political culture and was much worse during the Left rule. The TMC also claimed that its workers suffered almost equally at the BJP cadre's hands, with Mamata Banerjee promising to

compensate victims from both sides equally. As per Bengal BJP unit's claim, 37 BJP workers died in the violence.

The reports of the violence as well as the gruesome details propelled Indian Americans and other Non-Resident Indians abroad – across 30 US cities and various other parts of UK and Canada – to conduct widespread protests against what they saw as the Bengal government-sponsored genocide against Hindus (PTI, 2021).

The response from Central government has been measured. Instead of acting directly or allowing itself to be provoked into imposing an Emergency, the Centre had directed the central forces deputed for election duty to continue to remain in the state. Besides sending a few teams from the Centre to visit the violence-affected areas, the Centre also acted indirectly through the Governor. The latter has extensively toured Bengal and visited Assam's refugee camps, and has been applying consistent pressure on the Bengal government. The report of fact-finding team sent by the Home Ministry made the submission that even women were not spared from heinous crimes in the violence (News18, 2021). Through all these mechanisms, the Centre has been able to ensure that the public anger against the TMC has continued to boil.

The feasibility of imposing an Emergency was questionable as the nature of violence has varied, but the BJP Chief Ministers across other states are keeping alive the demands for President's Rule in Bengal, thereby keeping the issue in constant public focus. As per the numbers given by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), around 11000 people have been rendered homeless and 40000, mostly from the

majority community, have been affected by the violence (Ranjan, 2021). RSS and VHP have asked Hindus to exercise their right to self-defence.

Recently, the Calcutta High Court formed a three-member committee to enable persons displaced during the West Bengal post poll violence to return to their homes peacefully (Saxena, 2021). Moreover, more than 600 professors/academicians have appealed to the Supreme Court to take suo motu cognisance of the post-poll violence in West Bengal and set up a special investigation team to probe such incidents, alleging that those who voted against TMC are being systematically targeted (PTI, 2021).

From the point of view of the Hindus of West Bengal, the violence and the communal angle seen to it in some areas (despite widespread suppression by mainstream media), is an indication of the need for greater awareness of what the future holds in store. By keeping the issue alive, the BJP has signaled that it will not allow Mamata Banerjee to go scot-free in the foreseeable future.

ISRAEL-PALESTINE CONFLICT ESCALATION

Early this month, violence broke out between Israel and Hamas in Gaza strip. It is the fourth biggest conflict to break out between Hamas and Israel since 2008. The violence followed sustained tensions over Jerusalem, mainly over the threatened eviction of Palestinian families and plans to expand Jewish settlements. The initial clashes occurred at the Al-Aqsa mosque compound and the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood. These clashes turned into a heavy military conflict between Israel and Hamas.

Israel clearly had an upper hand in the conflict, due to superior war technologies. It conducted sustained airstrikes and artillery attacks in Gaza, killing nearly 248 Palestinians. It also bombarded several important infrastructural sites, such as Gaza's only COVID-19 testing facility, the building housing prominent international media houses and almost a thousand other properties.

Hamas came in for severe international criticism for indiscriminately firing nearly 4300 rockets into Israel. Israel was successfully able to repel almost 90% of them through the use of its anti-missile iron dome defence system – which was provided by the US and has become a bedrock of country's defence capabilities since 2011. Israel also tricked Hamas by misleading the media outlets about its potential targets, anticipating that Hamas would go underground. It thereby caught Hamas unawares and unleashed heavy bombing on their underground refuges.

In a parallel to this conflict, one of the worst ever episodes of internal communal violence within Israel also intensified, as Jew versus Arab riots broke out. However, it was successfully controlled through an internal crackdown and the death toll was minimal.

A subsequent ceasefire has now ended the hostilities between Israel and Hamas, but tensions continue to simmer in Jerusalem. There were, recently, renewed clashes between the Israeli police and civilians at Al-Aqsa mosque, due to stone-pelting incidents and civilian support for Hamas.

At the United Nations Human Rights Council, the vote on an anti-Israel resolution on whether to investigate the violations against civilians during the conflict saw abstention

from India, France, Japan and 11 other countries. Germany, UK and Austria opposed the resolution. However, Russia and China, alongside Pakistan, Bangladesh and 20 other countries favoured the investigation, thereby leading to the passage of the resolution.

SAUDI ARABIA-IRAN TALKS

For the first time since 2016, Saudi Arabia and Iran have opened up official channels of bilateral communication in an effort to improve their relations. Simultaneously, Saudi Arabia has also attempted to improve relations with Turkey and Qatar that have been frozen in recent years.

The groundwork for the Saudi Arabia-Iran talks was laid in April and currently both sides are holding talks. Coinciding with US effort to revive the nuclear deal with Iran, this breakthrough has been likely a result of the change of US Presidency, as President Biden has adopted a much more firm approach towards Saudi Arabia as compared to his predecessor. It has also been a result of the successive failure of Saudi foreign policy in the region, with a failed war in Yemen and failures in Syria having emboldened Iran, and the distance between Saudi Arabia and UAE widening due to the Yemen war.

To what extent the new détente between Saudi Arabia and Iran will hold remains to be seen, as the conflict between Shia and Sunni Islam is much more psychologically deep-rooted than foreign policy adjustments, and, Iran is unlikely to dismantle its intricately-built networks of Shia militias spread over the region to fight its proxy wars in other countries.

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Sri Aurobindo on Modern Medical Science

“Disease is needlessly prolonged & ends in death oftener than is inevitable, because the mind of the patient supports & dwells upon the disease of his body.”

“Medical Science has been more a curse to mankind than a blessing. It has broken the force of epidemics and unveiled a marvellous surgery; but, also, it has weakened the natural health of man and multiplied individual diseases; it has implanted fear and dependence in the mind and body; it has taught our health to repose not on natural soundness but a rickety & distasteful crutch compact from the mineral and vegetable kingdoms.”

“It is not the medicine that cures so much as the patient’s faith in the doctor and the medicine. Both are a clumsy substitute for the natural faith in one’s own self-power which they have themselves destroyed.”

“The healthiest ages of mankind were those in which there were the fewest material remedies.”

“Medical Science is well-meaning and its practitioners often benevolent and not seldom self-sacrificing; but when did the well-meaning of the ignorant save them from harm-doing?”

“Man was once naturally healthy and could revert to that primal condition if he were suffered; but Medical Science pursues our body with an innumerable pack of drugs and assails the imagination with ravening hordes of microbes.”

“I would rather die and have done with it than spend life in defending myself against a phantasmal siege of microbes. If that is to be barbarous [and] unenlightened, I embrace gladly my Cimmerian darkness.”

- CWSA 12: 474-77

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